

IN REMEMBRANCE

MISHTI MEYE KABORI

The final curtain drops on the "Mishti Meye" of Bangla cinema. On April 17, 2021, we had to bid our final farewell to the legendary actor Sarah Begum Kabori. The heartthrob of the 60s and 70s film industry has made immense contributions towards the growth of the Bangladeshi film industry. She has won the National film award twice, along with many other notable accolades. She will always be in our hearts as a symbol of courage and commitment. In remembrance of Sarah Begum Kabori, prominent personalities Mamunur Rashid, Gitiara Nasreen, Chinmoy Mutsuddi, Tariq Anam Khan, and Sohana Saba sat with Rafi Hossain to pay homage to the late actor.



Mamunur Rashid

"Kabori started acting back in 1963, and in 1964 her movie Sutorang was released. Back then, in Bangladesh, people could enjoy international movies. We got not only Indian or Hollywood films, we even got to see films coming from Lahore. Even with so many foreign films being shown, Sutorang became a massive hit. After that film, I became a big fan of Kabori and her acting. Then when we were making the television adaptation of Shongshoptok, based on Sahiduallah Kaiser's novel, we were looking for a female lead. So, we wanted to have Kabori in that role, and after asking her, she agreed on doing it. Unfortunately, we could not run the drama for too long as it was in the early months of 1971. She also appeared in one of my dramas, Manob, where she acted amazingly. She was also in Danob, where she acted alongside Tariq Anam Khan. Kabori was a very gifted actor. She used to listen to the director's instructions very well. When she was working on Sutorang under Subhash Dutta, she meticulously followed the director's instructions. When people close to you pass away, it feels like a part of you is gone. With Kabori's passing, it feels like that to me. She was not someone who limited herself to do just acting. She was involved in politics and even working with different institutions. Kabori did whichever work that she wanted to do. In a way, Kabori was lonely throughout her life. For artists, it is normal to feel lonely in life, and Kabori was no different. I think that a biopic about Kabori and her life should be made. It would be a



Mamunur Rashid PHOTO: COLLECTED

great sign of respect to her and also be a good opportunity for artists."

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Ridwan Intisaar Mahub

Gitiara Nasreen

"I can speak as an audience regarding this. My mother was a cinema fanatic, and as a kid, she would always take me with her to watch movies. As I was very young, I can't remember Kabori's first film that I watched. But I can still recall watching her in Shaat Bhai Champa. I even remember the iconic scenes as clear as day. However, I didn't only know her for her performance on the silver screen. In my youth, I saw her attend different events of the Film Society and their movements which had significant effects on the creation of good

films. So, while many have said that she went from being an actor to a leader, I did not only see her on-screen but also on the road. She took part in many of our events as a film researcher as well. For instance, I remember seeing her at the Press Club one day, and we were discussing the film censor board. She was very vocal about her views on the vagueness of the censor board regarding films that portrayed violence and abuse against women. We call a brave man a hero, but Kabori was a brave woman; I would say she was a shero. She was an activist, an artist. It is apparent in all of her work and writings. Initially in her career, she had an accent from living in Chittagong. She soon changed that and even learned how to perfectly lip-sync to songs in her films. The films during that time required a certain



Gitiara Nasreen PHOTO: COLLECTED

dramatic manner of acting, but Kabori tried to make her work seem easy and relatable, despite playing a range of different roles. Generally, we see female actors disappearing after working for few films. However, despite being someone who came into the limelight in 1964 and at the age of thirteen, she remained relevant in the film industry even till 2021. She broke many stereotypes. And, undoubtedly, she was also a prominent personality in the film industry, being the co-star in the debut films of five different actors who all went on to gain fame. She was sweet, brave, vocal, and a fighter. However, like many artists, she also dealt with loneliness. I find this to be natural given the society she grew up in and worked in. For example, I saw many people mention how she was known to be a sweet person on screen but in reality, had a bold personality. It seems as though in the industry, the word sweet and bold cannot co-exist in the discussion of women; it seems as if sweet must be synonymous with gullible. What is unique about Kabori is how she did not attempt to hide her feelings regarding this. She talked about it in her interviews and also wrote about it. She did not attempt to conceal her feelings of love. She was completely unscripted, and that is a difficult thing to do in our society where it is deemed ungracious, especially for a woman. Many aspects are absent in her writings, but I believe it is possible for us through this process of reminiscing to cherish her memories and those missing pieces. I want to celebrate Kabori, her work, contributions, and visions."

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Shreya Shomoyeeta



Chinmoy Mutsuddi PHOTO: COLLECTED

Chinmoy Mutsuddi

"I saw an advertisement, where it stated that the world is becoming smaller. Similarly, our cultural arena is also getting smaller as we bid goodbye to so many legendary faces. I do not know what the future awaits, but I can only pray. I grew up in the same town as Kabori, which is why, before seeing her on the silver screen, I saw Kabori do stage dance performances during my childhood. However, that is another side. On the work front, if I speak from the view of a journalist and celebrity relationship, then Kabori and my relationship long-lived. She knew me very well, vice versa, I knew her well, and it continued. In my 50 years of journalistic career, I have interviewed many prominent personalities and shared good relationships with many of them. But I feel some of the interviewees may have forgotten my name, and right at this moment, even I cannot recall each one of their names. But the relationship shared with Kabori was a unique and permanent one. Magazines and newspapers print different kinds of news and stories. When Kabori got involved with politics, she got criticized, and people talked about why the sudden change from entertainment to the political field. However, little does the world know that it was not sudden. She was always engaged in political and current affairs. While going through the pages of an old interview of Kabori taken by me from 1970, I realized half of the interview is political and global affairs discussion. Thus, her political stance was nothing new or surprising to me. To everyone, she is the "Mishti Meye," but people who have known her up close will address her to be a straight-forwarded woman. I positively say this. Till the end of her life, she was active in her profession and in whatever she thought of doing. On another note, I would like to request film fraternity, cultural and political agencies, and media agencies to come together and create an authorized biography for the legendary actor."

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Shreya Shomoyeeta

Tariq Anam Khan

"It is great to see everyone here today, but I am sure the occasion is equally disheartening for all of us. Often it feels as though the world is getting smaller. When talking about an artist,

it is necessary to discuss their work. I believe more opportunities should have been present for Kabori to be involved in acting. She never differentiated between film and television projects like many often tend to do. A reason for this may be that you need to memorise dialogues when working on television. When I worked with Kabori in Matir Kole, I remember that she always had her lines memorised. I had the honour to act in my debut film alongside her in Lal Sabujer Pala by Syed Hasan Imam. As it was my first film, I was very nervous, but she helped me overcome it. During shooting, she had minimal makeup and no excessive aspects about her. She acted from her heart and painted clear emotions. Even in her later years, she would ask to make her part of projects. I was reading about her life a few



Tariq Anam Khan PHOTO: COLLECTED

days back, about how she became Kabori from Mina Paa, and I learnt that she originally wanted to pursue dancing, as she used to perform during her school years. In some ways, she stumbled into acting, but despite not planning a career in this profession, she succeeded nonetheless. Nowadays, acting entails unnatural expressions and dancing. I watched a music video of hers, and I noticed how she managed eye contact with the camera for so long and displayed emotions perfectly. Her work was always realistic and relatable to the audience, unlike those today. She also had a strong passion for enhancing and benefitting the arts. Once, we planned to meet with the government regarding taxes relating to the television production industry. She was the MP back then, and she organised the entire process. During the liberation war, she went to Kolkata to help. Kabori had a big heart; she loved the arts, and she loved people. She was brave and took risks with her projects. We as a country need to learn about such artists and their works. Otherwise, we will lose sight of the country we had envisioned. Kabori continued with her work in the creative field despite various struggles in her personal life. However, like many artists, she attempted to express her lack of fulfilment in life through her art. She also wanted to give something back to the people. She used to say it's not just the government's duty to make a change, but also our own. Her outspokenness is a trait we do not come across very often. I find that to be very admirable. Because of this, I believed that she would overcome this struggle and get well from COVID-19. I could not comprehend

that she would leave this world. For those that Kabori helped and gave happiness to, we have to remember and celebrate her memory, work, and vision of a liberal Bangladesh. Hopefully, someday an impartial recollection of history will do so too. I would love to engage in a conversation about Kabori and her art once again. She will not be lost. I hope she achieves eternal peace."

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Shreya Shomoyeeta

Sohana Saba

"For me, it's still difficult to talk about Kabori apa. When I first met her, it was at her office. When I walked into the room, I was surprised to see how simple she was. I could see her express her feelings not just through her words but also through her facial expressions. She always kept her words straightforward. Kabori apa sat with the entire cast and showed us how to act and what to do before four or five months of shooting. There was a day when I went into her office, she reading a script in front of me when she just burst into tears. I was shocked at first, but then I understood her years of experience can make her burst into tears so easily. Kabori apu is someone who worked very hard to get to the heights she received. For everything she did, she took training. We also saw how much of an activist she was, and she not only spoke against injustice but worked against it. Kabori apu is someone who will be remembered not only through her films, but also her political career and



Sohana Saba PHOTO: COLLECTED

the things which she did for people. One thing that she once said struck me a lot. She told me not to trust men, and it made me realize that she may have experiences that made her think that way. By saying that she was not saying that all men are bad or do not trust any men ever, but to be wary of whom you trust. I think that with what everyone was saying, maybe she had been a bit lonely because of those experiences. She was a very active woman. She would cook food, feed it to her kids. Even when guests would go over, she would sit and talk to them and make them food. She did everything while still working with film directions and even holding meetings."

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Ridwan Intisaar Mahub